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### *Cultural inclusion: a mission of university art museums*

„Visitors construct meaning within museums using a range of interpretative strategies. The meaning made is personal, related to existing mental constructs, and to the pattern of ideas on which the individual bases his or her other interpretations of their experience of the world; but it is also social in that it is influenced by the individual's significant others' (family, peer group, friends, colleagues), which comprise the community of meaning-makers to which the individual belongs. The meaning that an individual constructs is also political, in the sense that both personal and social meanings come about as a result of life-chances, social experience, knowledge of ideas, attitudes and class, gender and ethnicity. From this perspective it is easy to understand how deeply museums are embedded in the politics of culture”.

E. Hooper-Greenhill<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Education, communication and interpretation: towards a critical pedagogy in Museums* [in:] E. Hooper-Greenhill (ed), *The Educational Role of the Museum*, p. 3–27. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Routledge, London and New York 1999, citation from p. 11–12.

Najważniejsze tezy artykułu odzwierciedla wypowiedź E. Hooper-Greenhill, którą podajemy w polskim przekładzie:

„Zwiedzający nadają znaczenie muzeom, stosując indywidualne rodzaje interpretacji. To znaczenie jest osobiste, związane z konstrukcją mentalną oraz z wzorcami idei, które każda osoba interpretuje według własnych doświadczeń; jednakże jest też elementem społecznym, gdyż wpływ na nie mają osoby ważne dla danej jednostki (rodzina, grupa rówieśnicza, przyjaciele, koledzy), które stanowią społeczność opiniotwórczą, do której należy zwiedzający. Również aspekty polityczne nie pozostają bez wpływu na jednostkę, gdyż zarówno doświadczenia osobiste, jak i społeczne są wynikiem możliwości życiowych, doświadczeń społecznych, znajomości idei, postawy wobec życia, klasy, płci i przynależności etnicznej. Z tej perspektywy łatwo zrozumieć, jak głęboko muzea są zakorzenione w polityce kultury”.

## Introduction

The theme of this paper is the introduction of a social and culturally inclusion Program to the exclusive territory of a Brazilian public university contemporary art museum<sup>3</sup>. The Program – 6 hours divided into two encounters – was aimed at teachers of children under 6 years old, who must hold a university degree in the next couple of years.

The opportunity and obligation to design research programs and to reflect, think, evaluate and work on the conclusions is a challenge typical of the academic life and happens naturally inside a university museum<sup>4</sup>. The hypothesis that launched this research was articulated as two questions: a) can an art museum participate and collaborate effectively in the task of socio-cultural inclusion of marginalized populations or will it only reinforce a perception of exclusion?; and b) can a 'museum pedagogy' developed for that special public provoke a relationship with the visual arts that leads this particular visitor (the teacher) into a museum visitor, or even better, into an individual cognizant of questions related to cultural identity and diversity?<sup>5</sup>

How can art museums offer programs for groups of a population socially and culturally marginalized? What are the advantages of offering these kinds of programs that might be perceived as superficial representation of the 'high' culture?<sup>6</sup>

To create a cultural action that aims at leading to the transformation of mentalities and perceptions, directed at a population that is marginalized socially and culturally, is to think not only of education but also of items that involve ethics and citizenship. When considering providing similar learning opportunities to children of different social classes it is important to consider problems related to cultural accessibility, cultural actions for educators and teachers of those excluded children. It is also necessary to reflect on issues of teaching and learning, given that, without the active complicity of teachers and educators, the best pedagogy will not reach the desired goals. To propose cultural actions for these educators is to reflect about the world and the society we live in<sup>7</sup>, issues such as communication in a mediated world, cultural issues in a global-

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<sup>3</sup> Cultural inclusion understood as a broadening of personal universes, of the process of interiorization of values as citizenship, cultural identity and the knowledge of the others and their diversity, and consequently the construction of an ability to criticize.

<sup>4</sup> According to E. Hopper-Greenhill, 1999, *op.cit.*, p. 4, „A critical museum pedagogy is an educational approach that reviews and develops its methods, strategies and provision with regard both to educational excellence and to working towards the democratization of the museum. (...) The development of a critical museum pedagogy that uses existing good practice for democratic purposes is a major task for museums and galleries in the twenty-first century”.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. Bourdieu & A. Darbel, *O amor pela arte. Os museus de arte na europa e seu público*, Edusp & Zouk, São Paulo 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Bernardo Kliksberg, the Coordinator of the *Instituto Interamericano de Desenvolvimento Social* (BID), stated that: „(...) exclusion is an ethic theme. Its existence and magnitude conflicts directly with values of respect to life, overcoming of discriminations, and opportunities for all on what our civilizations and democratic system are based”. B. Kliksberg, *Ética y desarrollo. La relación marginada*, El Ateneo, Buenos Aires 2002, citation from p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> It is impossible to describe, in a few lines, the multiple aspects of the world we live in. Here, I only point out some ideas that were taken into consideration during the elaboration of the Program described in this paper: globalization, as opposed to nationalism; mass communication, local cultures and their mixing constructing new identities; the permanent tension among local identities and world culture. The plural

ize world, and ethnic issues in a society that is exchanging its soil and its territories for virtual experiences. It is to think, primordially, about questions related to how identity is articulated on different individual and social levels and about questions of cultural identity, national identity and of the forms of representation of these different frames of mind; it is also to think about different expressive languages and, in this present study, about contemporary art. And to make projects of cultural actions that involve the art of our days is to think of art museums, about mediation problems between art and the visitor, about museological choices and narratives, curatorial issues as well as about leisure and learning. It is also to reflect on the different meanings that may emerge in the territory of an exhibit, to understand the narratives that are elaborated in the space between the art works and the visitor; it is to think about negotiating meanings among each group of visitors.

Detailed discussion of these many ideas are beyond the scope of this paper. The issues that interested me at the time this research was developed were those related to ethics in cultural actions. The fact is – as observed by Villoro<sup>8</sup> – much attention must be given in the construction of programs oriented to the development of cultural forms that are related to the real necessities of the different sectors of society, in order to avoid submission to cultural forms manipulated by economic interests, as well as those oriented against the imposition of a servile imitation. In short, the programs must aim to propitiate changes of attitudes related to present day society and favor language skills to argue and fight for its interests<sup>9</sup>.

## The Context

São Paulo (Brazil) is a megalopolis of 10.5 million inhabitants. Its population is mostly descended from the Portuguese who colonized our country, Africans who were brought as slaves and, especially during the last one hundred years, European immigrants (mainly from Italy, but after World War II, from almost all European countries), many people from Japan and lately, from Bolivia and Korea. Although about 80% of these people declare themselves Roman Catholics, there are about 30 different religions or sects registered by our census. In São Paulo alone there are 1.2 million children under the age of six. In short, this megalopolis breathes cultural diversity, but appears more homogenous because of the unification process of mass communication.

In Brazil, prejudice is not an issue that is discussed openly. It surfaces most crudely not against different nationalities, races or skin colors, nor even between different religions or genders, but between different social classes and their inherent cultural diversity.

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state, as it presents itself to day demands processes of dialog, recognizing the differences and particularities, it demands the practice of the 'ethics of solidarity' (L. Villoro, *Estado plural, pluralidad de culturas*, Editorial Paidós Mexicana S.A., Mexico 1998).

<sup>8</sup> L. Villoro, 1998, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> For further information on this area, see E.B. Feldman, *The teacher as critic* [in:] S.M. Dobbs (ed.), *Research Readings for Discipline Based Art Education. A Journey Beyond Creating*, National Art Education Association, Virginia, USA 1988, p. 58–66.

Due to our colonial heritage and present economic situation, one of the most serious problems presently is the great number of deprived children who, with little or no educational opportunities, are brought up with no chance of developing a readiness to learn, or the knowledge to solve problems – much needed skills to keep in touch with ever changing professional demands. For this population, the access to public universities – ones that are free and accept only good students – is, for most, an unreachable dream. Therefore, these socially and culturally discriminated children of poor families at present have a bleak future to look forward to. Their educators and teachers come, mostly, from the same environment as their families, i.e. they are very poorly educated. Many non governmental agencies are working hard to reverse this situation, and it is my firm belief that the learned society as a whole, and the universities in particular, must participate, and that, of course, includes public university art museums. Art museums must take a role in this effort. It should be the work, or better still, the mission of public university museums, to create programs that put the intangible heritage, represented by the museum's collection, to work as a link in the process of social and cultural inclusion. The potential of museums to develop Programs that help to build up self confidence, a higher sense of self-worth and a sense of belonging is well established in numerous studies. The fact that Museums can inspire powerful and identity-building learning has been proven by several research projects and programs, particularly those published by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the Department of Museums Studies at the University of Leicester, England.

In the past few years much research has been published that has established the value of education in art museums to the curriculum at regular schools. The concept of non-formal education has been justly applied to Museum learning<sup>10</sup>.

## The Program

Keeping in mind the above mentioned ethical aspects, a carefully elaborated program was the tool developed to evaluate the proposed hypothesis. It was composed of several stages aimed at leading the 98% female participants – mostly non-museum visitors with secondary education – to a satisfactory, even transforming relationship with the museum experience. Several concepts guided the program's structure<sup>11</sup>: cultural action, identity and diversity, cultural identities and globalization, cultural exclusion and inclusion; contemporary art, and learning in museums. The following strategies were adopted in the development of the program: (1) Art as a learning tool,

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. the comprehensive research published in *re:source*, The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, *Measuring the Outcomes and Impact of Learning in Museums Archives and Libraries*, *The learning Impact Research Project – End of Project Paper*, 01 May 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Each concept is further discussed in G.S. Wilder, *As artes visuais do século XX como visão de mundo e exercício de diversidade. Inclusão cultural: uma missão de museus de Arte Contemporânea*, 2004. [Twentieth century visual arts as a vision of the world and an exercise in diversity. Social inclusion: A mission of contemporary art museums]. PhD in Communication Science, School of Communication and Art, University of São Paulo, Brasil. The concept of 'cultural action' – giving special attention to ethical issues as mentioned in the introduction, questions of self confidence and higher sense of self-worth, as well as sense of place and sense of belonging, as opposed to virtual territory, mass media and the well known issues provoked by the process called 'globalization' – was given special focus.

a means to make the public conscious of issues such as identity, diversity and multiculturalism; (2) invitations directed to attract particular types of visitors – educators of day-care centers and teachers of children under 6 years in public schools and non-governmental organizations with no university degree.

The program aimed at (1) provoking awareness to questions related to cultural identity, its values and particularities as opposed to signs of other cultural identities, and their particularities and values; (2) enabling the participants to understand contemporary art as an expression of present-day culture, and relate it to their own cultural distinctiveness, as well as to point out representations related to their own cultural values; (3) to introduce the practice of attributing meanings to – interpreting – art works; (5) to discuss the pedagogic possibilities of working with visual arts, museums and young children education, by discussing the text ‘The Role of Imagery in Learning’ by Harry S. Broudy<sup>12</sup>; (6) to provoke questioning on issues related to the concept of citizenship.

A very important objective of the program was to transmit to the participants a knowledge and enthusiasm that would spread to other teachers.

The program consisted of several steps, spread over activities developed during 2 days of 3 hours each, as follows:

The reception was treated as an important first moment – an orientation to the Program (II. I). I was aware that most of the participants did not initially feel at home within a museum or inside a university: „The museum is not our place (...) the coordinator sent me here”. They were unsure, aware of their lack of knowledge, and afraid that they might be humiliated, so it was important to make them feel at ease by recognizing their expertise (the education of young children), offering mine (the knowledge of contemporary art and learning in museums) and proposing an exchange of expertise. The second step – sensitization – happened in front of an exhibition of large colorful abstract paintings. The participants were invited to speak about their impressions, feelings and emotions. The next paintings they viewed were geometric, constructive works. Again they were invited to point out and comment the differences of these styles and their possible various levels of meaning. The third exhibition room they visited was of contemporary art of the late 1990s that related to present day issues. They were encouraged to observe and talk about those issues among themselves, sharing memories and narratives, comparing experiences. The objective of this particular exercise was to conduct their first experience with twentieth century art as an expressive language that communicates itself through images, colors, forms, and different materials, and that different meanings might emerge in these perceptions, according to different ways of interpreting what is observed. The main point of this moment of the program was to link the unfamiliar environment of contemporary art to their everyday experience of the world.

The next step of the process was a lecture on the many ways in which art could be used to add value and new interests to their current teaching programs, i.e. by developing the capacity to concentrate; recognizing familiar and unfamiliar images, as well

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<sup>12</sup> H.S. Broudy, *The role of imagery in learning*, The Getty Center for Education in the Arts, Los Angeles, California 1987; as well as H. Gardner, *Art education and human development*, The Getty Center for Education in the Arts, Los Angeles, California 2000. This research was also guided by the methodology and results presented in D.N. Perkins & H. Gardner, *Why Zero? A brief introduction to Project Zero*, „Journal of Aesthetic Education”, 1988, 22 (1), p. VII–X.

as enhancing the visual and verbal vocabulary of the children, thereby developing language skills and the knowledge to negotiate ideas<sup>13</sup>.

A video<sup>14</sup> made of a practical experience with children in the Contemporary Art Museum of the São Paulo University that applied these pedagogical practices, was then presented demonstrating how to conduct a visit with young children in an exhibition and how to enhance this experience in their classrooms.

This step was followed by a regular guided tour in the modern art exhibition of the museum (paintings dated from 1912 through 1935), conducted by a museum guide, an activity that would have been unthinkable two hours earlier. At this point the groups demonstrated the fact they were very much at home and enjoying their time within the museum by asking many questions.

At the closure of this first day the group identified what issue(s) they would like to explore during our second encounter. At this moment the participants were asked to bring projects they were developing with their pupils, as a means to share and value their expertise and exchange experiences. Generally the teachers chose to work on the issue of identity and its various models of representation within an exhibit, i.e. not only through self-portraiture but also through signs related to their everyday life.

A week later, the opening of the second encounter was always very different from the first one. The teachers now felt at ease in the museum, and during the first quarter of an hour were invited to narrate if and how their first visit had already influenced their teaching and their projects with their pupils, if it had transformed the way they perceive the landscape and/or their school environment: „I began to see with different eyes, I saw a painting in the deans office that has been there for two years, for the first time (...) and the art works of the children: We learned that art is something that comes from inside, it expresses emotions, and the moment we pass this on to the child she will also begin to notice this, isn't it?“<sup>15</sup>.

The next step in the program was a visit to an exhibition of contemporary art (1990–2000) targeting works that refer to contemporary identity signs and cultural issues, such as an art work composed of a group of black and white discarded ID photographs or an enlarged hyper realistic representation of a workers food plate<sup>16</sup>. At this stage they were relating to very recent art works as opposed to the more historical ones seen during their first visit. The aim of this exercise was to demonstrate that there is no true or correct way to represent identity and the universal question ‘who are we’ can be represented incalculably.

Those who, during their reception on the first day, had declared they did not understand anything related to modern art, were now talking freely about their perceptions, feelings, memories, and exchanged ideas. At this point the art exhibit had become a starting point to develop new projects and had revealed its educational potential in

<sup>13</sup> For further information, see D.N. Perkins & H. Gardner, *op.cit.* and D.N. Perkins, *The intelligent Eye. Learning to Think by Looking at Art*, The Getty Center for Education in the Arts, Los Angeles, California 1994.

<sup>14</sup> G. S. Wilder, *O museu e a criança* [The museum and the child]. 13' video, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> „I remembered today coming to the Museum, seeing the river and thinking: it is so dirty, they are not taking care of things (...)“.

<sup>16</sup> Respectively *Lição de Realismo Fantástico* by Rosângela Rennó (1991) and *Série Prato Típico: Marmita*, by Rochelli Costa (1997).

relation to history, citizenship and identity, as elaborated by Hooper-Greenhill and reproduced at the beginning of this paper<sup>17</sup>.

The third step of the second encounter was a formal session during which the teachers presented the projects they were developing with their children. This was asked for at the end of the first day activities. At this moment their pride in what they were achieving with their children was absolutely evident.

Finally they were invited to produce their own art work on identity. They were offered a diversity of materials to choose from, such as painting materials, many photocopies of photographs taken during their first day at the museum, leaves collected in the university's gardens, scissors, glue, magazines. These works were displayed and each of the participants discussed what they were trying to express or communicate in their work. At this moment, more than any other, narratives emerged about their museum experience, what had changed in their perceptions of art, some critical views of their own culture, and their work with the children<sup>18</sup>.

Certificates handsomely inscribed 'The Museum of Contemporary Art of the São Paulo University' were awarded as a closing act (II. II). Even though they were informed these documents had no legal significance, the participants loved them and expressed their emotion of receiving such a memento.

## Evaluation

We offered the program nine times during 2001 and 2002, to a total of 190 teachers. Each one of the encounters was carefully recorded on video tape and many photographs were taken of each step. Each photograph was identified and, with the help of the videos, we wrote down all the comments made by the participants on the different occasions.

In order to answer the questions proposed by our hypothesis these comments were analyzed and classified according to the following categories: cultural identity; art as a means to make the public conscious of questions such as identity and diversity; perception of contemporary art as a language that expresses our present culture; affirmatives on the pedagogical possibilities of complementing infant education with museum

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<sup>17</sup> All comments and discussions by participants were recorded and videotaped by two students involved in this research. This material was the principal data analyzed to evaluate the participants' understanding of questions related to cultural identity, diversity, national culture, globalization, and so on. Records often mentioned folksongs, food, games, and festivities they used to practice and that are now disappearing due to mass culture.

<sup>18</sup> Just to mention a few of the innumerable examples: „I was frightened during our first meeting. Today, no, something new stayed, it was a pleasant learning. I thought that modern art was something far away and now I noticed that it is not so distant. I don't think anymore that the works of the children are rubbish, I understood that what is important is the creativity, to play with the emotions: now I value more the work of the children"; „This possibility of exchange enlarges very much our vision. Each thing that the other talked about we also tried to see what the other was seeing and did not stay with the first impression"; „It was an awakening, it sharpened my consciences to see"; „People are always talking about that it is necessary to insert the excluded into the circle. I put [in the painting] the teacher [a photocopy of me] inside the circle because I had access to USP [University of São Paulo] people. I felt myself inside the circle and I am feeling great. We hear about this very much but we do not have this experience".

experiences; understanding the visual arts as a language; expressions denoting the transformation of attitudes and perceptions.

Two day-care centers, whose entire staff participated – on different occasions – in the program, were visited by me before their educators came to the Museum and a couple of months after their museum experience, in order to interview the teachers and observe any evidence of modifications in the culture of these institutions. These interviews demonstrated that some things inside the nursery/day care center/kindergarten had effectively changed. The teachers now kept and exhibited each month the works of the children (as opposed to sending them home every day, where their over-worked parents threw them away), and invited the parents to appreciate them; the walls were filled with images and they included art in all their projects. The dean of the first day-care center declared that that year (2001) the children in general were much calmer and happier than the year before<sup>19</sup>.

## Concluding remarks

The analysis of the comments registered during the development of the program with the nine groups showed we had met the objectives of the program, namely we had identified some transformations in attitudes, values, emotions and beliefs<sup>20</sup>.

Changes were observed with relation to the perception of identity: „(...) these are my roots, my history, I come from (...) and national identity: „I love my country, I love Brazil, I love the green (...)”. Perceptions of questions related to the effects of globalization: „We don't open our eyes to our own culture (...) the children speak words in English (...)”. Art is recognized as a symbolic language: „White is the possibility of all that we can still do (...)”. Self-esteem was demonstrated in comments like: „I felt very important because I came here and participated in this course”. Emotions erupted in comments about life as a value, hope, happiness, positive thinking: „(...) at the end all goes well”. Learning was perceived as a value too: „I came looking for knowledge (...)” and contemporary art as an accessible language „I thought it was something inaccessible and now I see it is not so distant (...)”. Some comments showed nature as an important value: „When I stay away from nature, I am far away from my own values”.

Overall, the art works produced during the last stage of the program also demonstrated that most of the participants understood modern art as inspiring freedom in the use of forms and means of representing the world, ideas and feelings, as opposed to stereotypes such as houses and a yellow sun.

In conclusion, the questions that motivated and set the parameters of this research – can a art museum participate and collaborate effectively in the task of socio-cultural inclusion of marginalized populations or will it only reinforce a perception of exclusion

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<sup>19</sup> I visited that particular day care center in 2004 and was told by the dean that children were still working intensely with art and developing programs with teachers that included visiting museums.

<sup>20</sup> The evaluation categories were drawn from E. Hooper-Greenhill, J. Dodd, T. Moussouri, C. Jones, C. Pickford, C. Herman, M. Morrison, J. Vincent & R. Toon, *Measuring the Outcomes and Impact of Learning in Museums Archives and Libraries. The Learning Impact Research Project*. Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, University of Leicester 2003. [In [www.resource.gov.uk/documents/insplearn-wp2003.05.01.doc](http://www.resource.gov.uk/documents/insplearn-wp2003.05.01.doc), accessed on 25 November 2003].



and, can a peculiar relationship with the visual arts transform a non museum visitor into one aware of questions related to cultural identity and diversity? – led to the following considerations:

- a) educational programs carried out at art museums favor transformations in individual perceptions and in attitudes with relation to the arts and their meanings;
- b) educational programs of this nature can be adapted to art museums in general;
- c) art works instigate dialogs about identity, culture and knowledge;
- d) non-visiting publics may recognize that visits to museums can be significant experiences that transform attitudes and create new perceptions;
- e) contemporary art inspires freedom of creation, encourages experimentation, and offers avenues of understanding oneself and the world in general.

In short, this study demonstrated that carefully conceived programs can bring about a change in attitudes in relation to the importance of arts in learning, and an awareness of matters related to cultural identity, self-esteem, sense of belonging, interpreting and understanding visual culture, and critical thinking as opposed to submission to mass media. Furthermore, the research stressed the certainty that contemporary art museums – whose exhibitions are generally aimed at a learned public – can be welcoming and enticing for audiences that generally do not consider museums of any interest or relevance to their lives.



II. I. The first moment of the Program: educators and teachers arriving at the Museum of Contemporary Art, University of São Paulo. Among their first impressions were: „The museum is not our place”; „I was told to come here” and „I don’t know anything about modern art” (photo G.S. Wilder)



II. II. The last moment of the Program: „Something new remained (...)”; „It was a very special day for me”; „I come here looking for knowledge. I always wanted to visit the university campus, to study at USP. Knowledge is very important. Today I am in USP” (photo G.S. Wilder)